

CHILDREN'S
COLLECTION



LITTLE SAINT AGNES

By Helen Walker Homan

*Pictures by a Religious of the
Congregation of Mary*

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ERRATUM

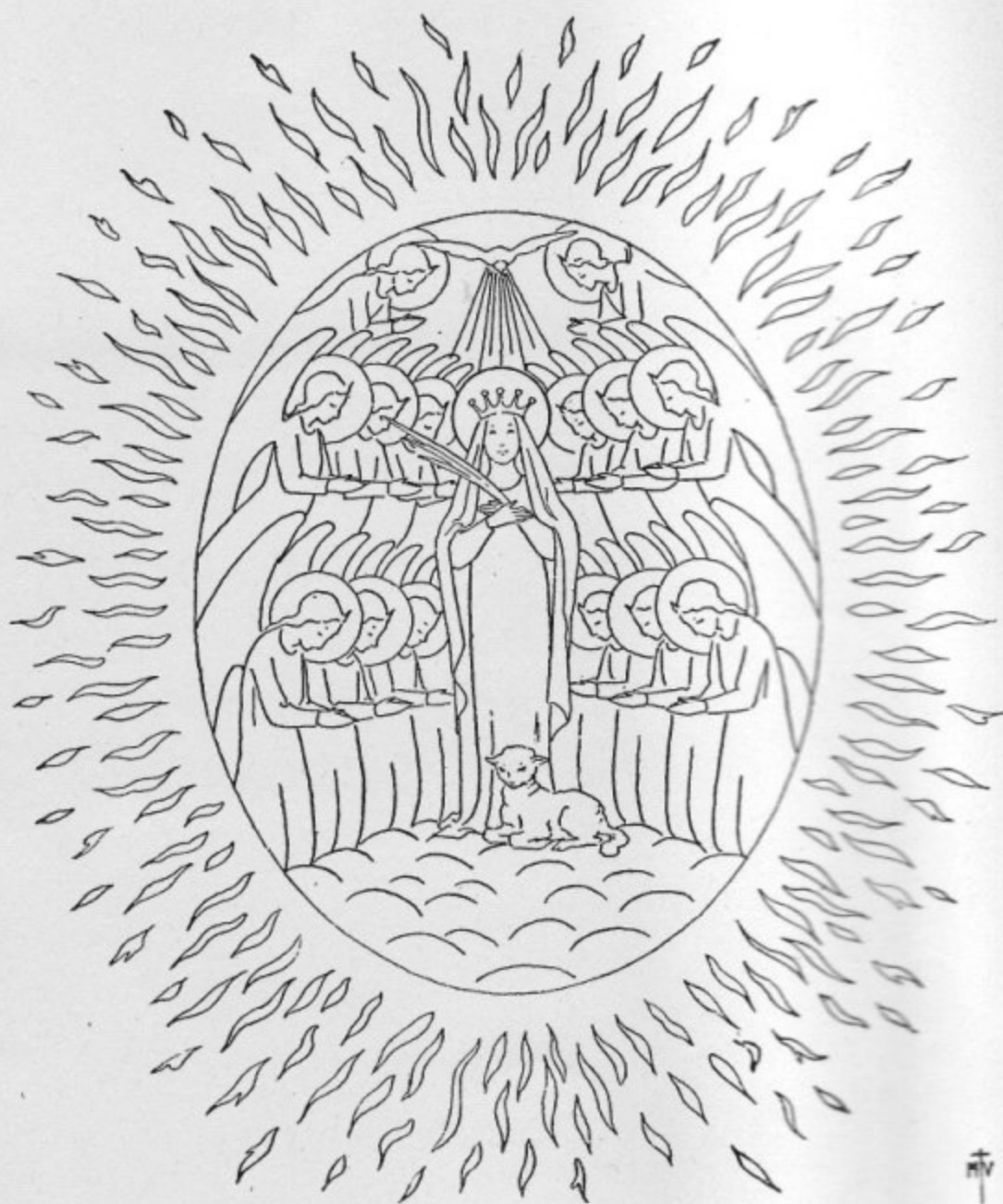
Title page and cover:

A Religious of the Congregation of Mary
should read

A Religious of the Community of Saint Mary

TO
MARY JANE

922
H75



Vision of Agnes in Glory

LITTLE SAINT AGNES

BY

HELEN WALKER HOMAN

PICTURES BY

A RELIGIOUS OF THE CONGREGATION OF MARY



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LITTLE SAINT AGNES

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I

A CHILD OF ROME

THIS is the story of a very great little girl who never grew up. One hears so much about grown-ups who were great that it becomes rather tiresome after a while. But little Agnes proved that one does not have to be grown-up to be great.

Many, many years ago she lived in the wonderful city of Rome. A mighty emperor sat upon the throne and sent his soldiers far and wide to hold the countries Rome had conquered. Almost everything in the whole world was Roman, even the noses; and I think the Emperor must have had the largest Roman nose of all, because he was the Emperor.

When Agnes went to walk she would pass beautiful buildings and marble statues like those we see in books, only the

arms and the heads had not yet been broken off. Beyond the high gates she could look into blooming gardens belonging to rich houses.

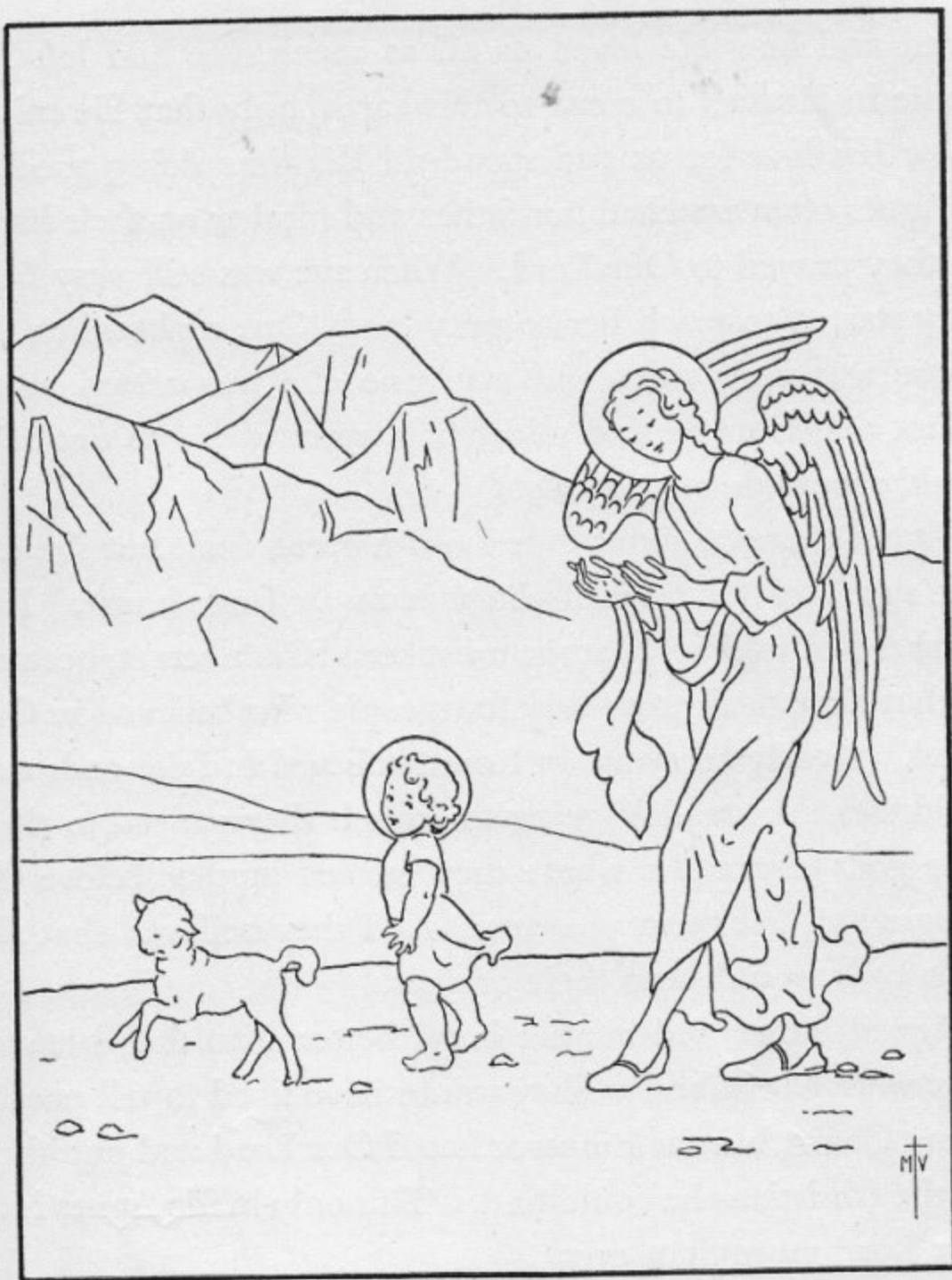
The flowers were the gayest and brightest you ever saw, for the sun almost always shone in Rome; and the sky was so soft and blue that you wanted to reach up and pull down a piece of it.

In Rome, most of the little children had everything their hearts desired, but one thing, and that was — but first you must hear about Agnes who had that one thing.

When she was born, an angel, sent by God to watch over her all through her life, came and tucked her into her cradle. When she was able to walk, Agnes' guardian angel went with her everywhere. And because she felt the angel was near, although she could not see him, she was never afraid. When she was only a little child people talked about her courage and her joyous nature. Agnes was kind, too, and when she knew that others were in trouble she would comfort them.

She did not do kind things only because she felt like it. It was because she knew about Someone of Whom most of the children in Rome had never heard.

When her mother put her to bed at night she would tell Agnes a certain beautiful story. It was the story of Our



Agnes joyously sets forth on life's pilgrimage

Lord and how He loved us all so much, He had left His home in Heaven to come to this earth, only that He might show His love for us and spend all His time doing good.

Agnes often watched her father and mother on their knees as they prayed to Our Lord. When she was still very little they started to teach her to pray too. One night when the house was very quiet and everyone else was asleep, some infant angels came and said her prayers with her until she could repeat them perfectly.

Agnes thought about Our Lord a great deal, but she did not speak of Him when she was away from home. Her mother had told her that she must keep Him a secret, because at that time there were very few people who believed in Our Lord. Nearly everyone in Rome believed in false gods and goddesses. Instead of going to church they prayed to their false gods in temples where they burned incense before the images and left them presents. And they believed that the false gods would hear their prayers.

Agnes' father and mother knew better than this, because they were Christians. They would have liked to tell people about Christ, but the Emperor hated Our Lord and punished all the Christians he could find. This only made Agnes love Our Lord more than ever.



Agnes taught her prayers by the holy angels

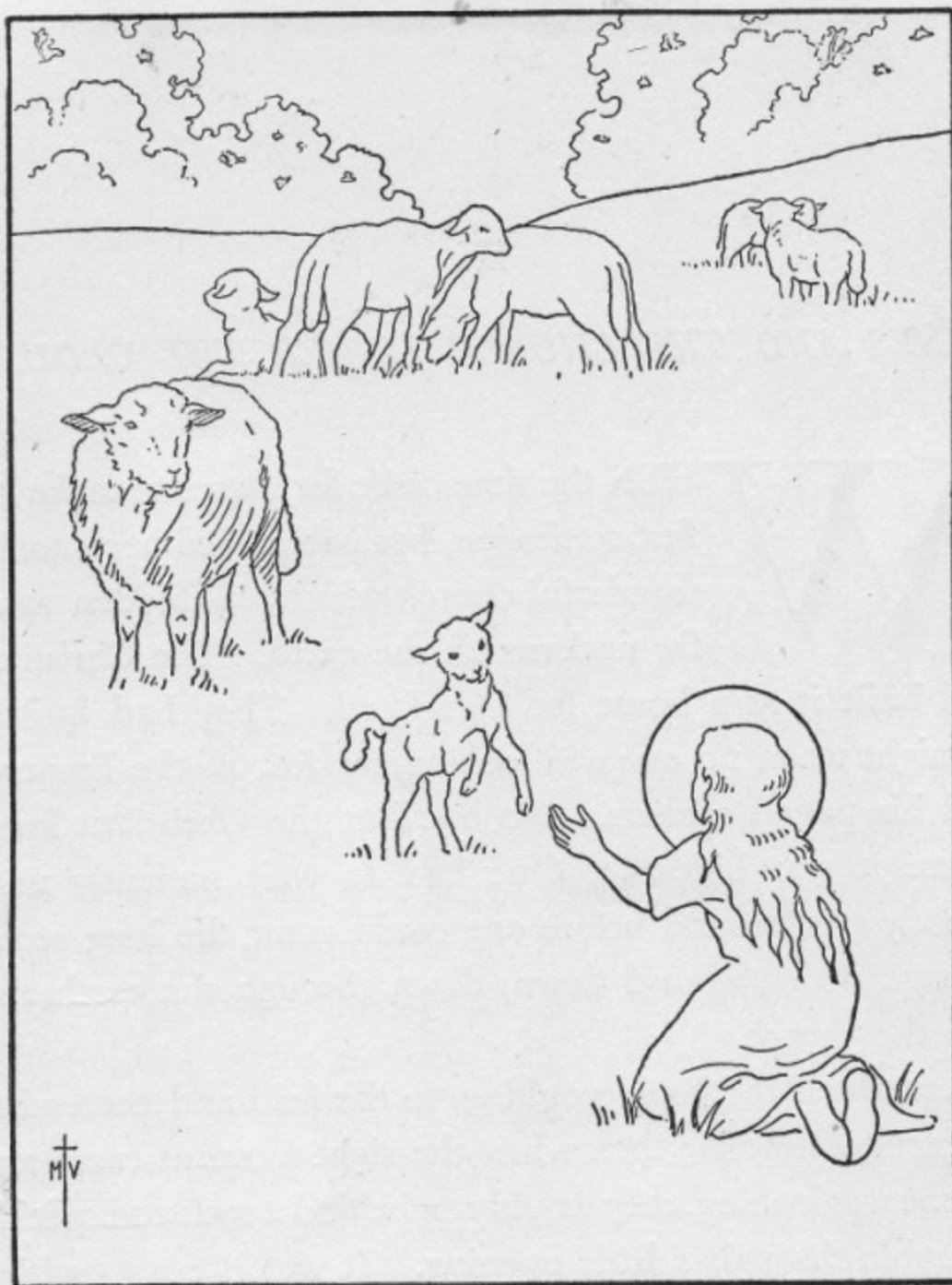
II

AGNES' LAMB

NOT far away from the home where Agnes lived with her parents and her foster sister, Emerentiana, there were green meadows and great trees. As she grew older Agnes was often taken there to play. Of course she loved the flowers and birds, but even more than these she loved the little lambs who lived there with them.

Perhaps this was because her mother had told her that she had been called for a lamb herself, that the name "Agnes" really meant a lamb. The lambs themselves seemed to know this very well, for whenever they saw Agnes coming they would run to meet her and wait for her to stroke them. Then she would play with them for hours under the trees.

One day the farmer gave Agnes a little lamb all for her own, and after that she took it with her everywhere she went.



Agnes playing with her lamb

III

AGNES AND THE CHURCH UNDER THE GROUND

WHEN the time came for Agnes to make her first confession, her parents led her into the wonderful church which was hidden away far underneath the earth. The Christians had built it as a house for Our Lord. They had built it by night when no one was looking, for fear of the Emperor and his pagan soldiers. No one but the Christians knew where it was hidden. One had to wait patiently until nobody was around before one could enter the long secret passage which wound down, down through the earth and into the church.

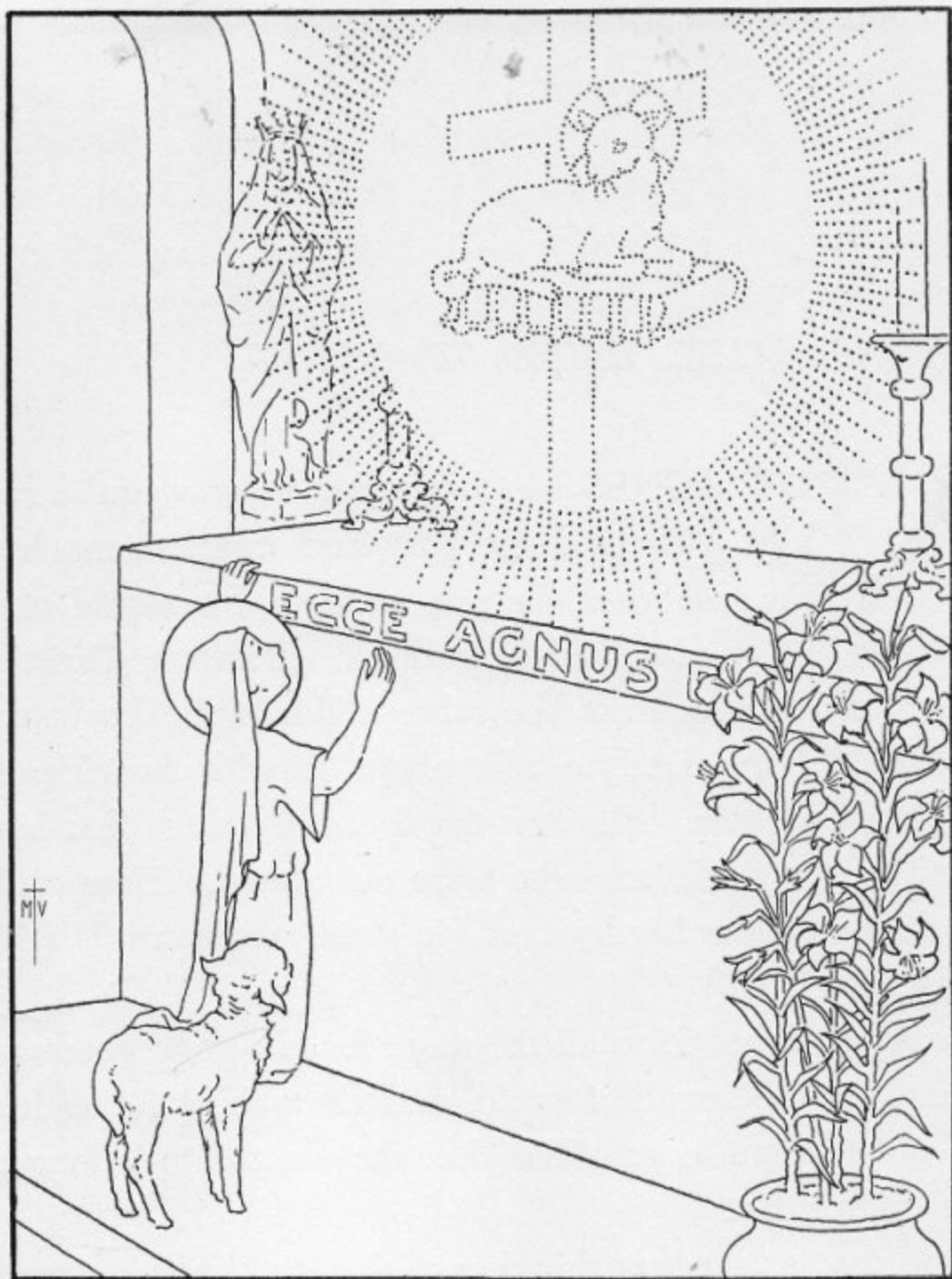
Agnes and the lamb would go to the field and pretend to be picking flowers; then when the right moment came and no one was looking, they would run behind a rock and quickly scramble through a little opening. It was like an exciting



Agnes making her first confession

game, keeping the pagans from seeing them and finding the church.

Our Lord Himself lived there in the Blessed Eucharist. Right under the place where He lived on the altar were carved the words: "Behold the Lamb of God." It was lovely to learn that Our Lord too, was called a lamb, for it made Agnes feel closer to Him than ever.



Vision of the Lamb of God

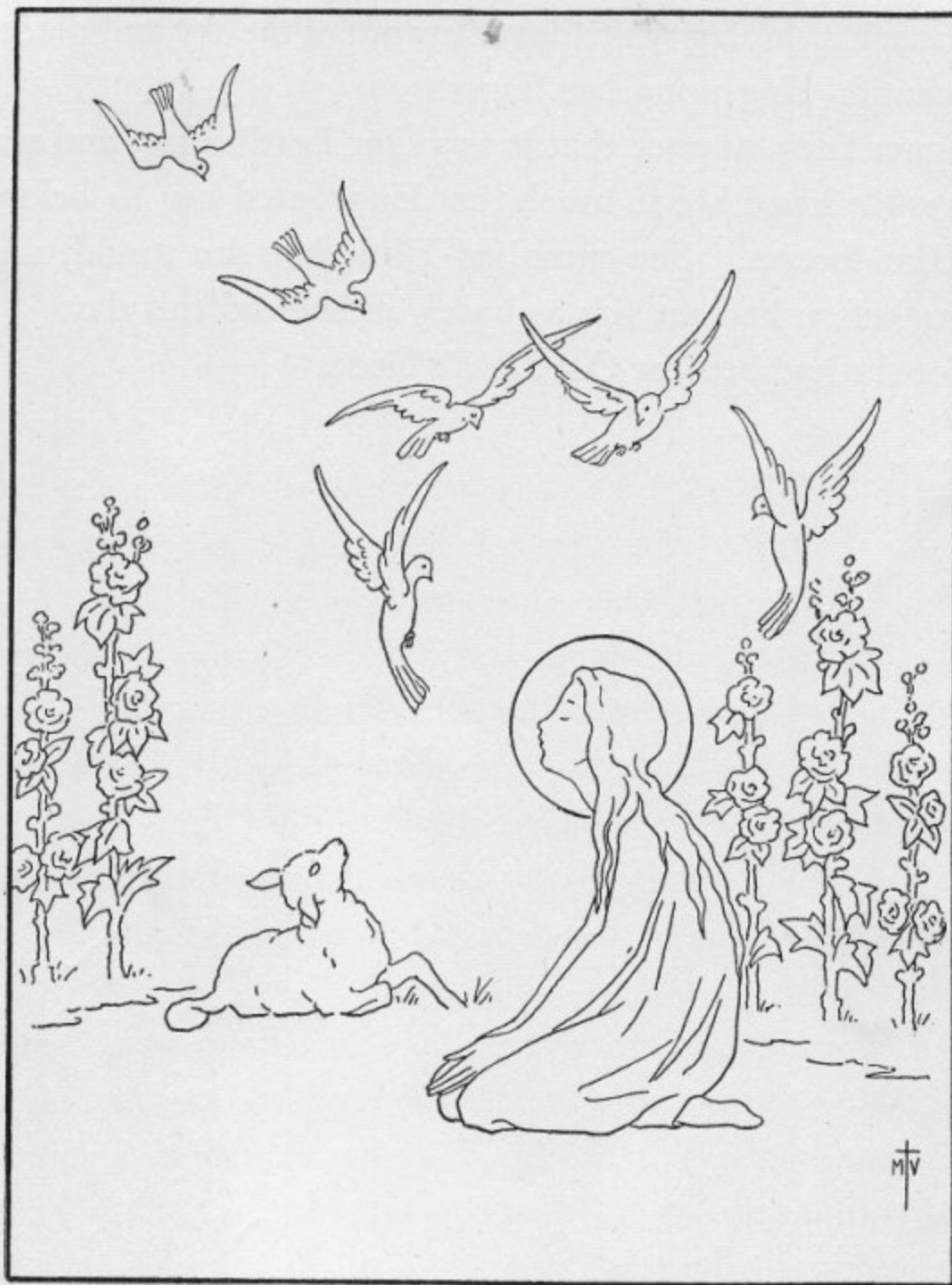
IV

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

NOW AGNES was beginning to grow quite rapidly. She did not play and romp so much as she had when she was younger, but would often sit in the field and think. Being a Christian made her different from the other children she knew and she would have liked to talk about it with her friends, but she dared not. She saw the dreadful things that happened to the Christians who were discovered. How could people hate Our Lord when He went about all His life doing good?

So Agnes loved Him all the more for His great goodness, for making the beautiful world, and for making Agnes herself. She began to tell Him that she wanted to belong to Him completely.

One day, as she was thinking of this, suddenly it seemed

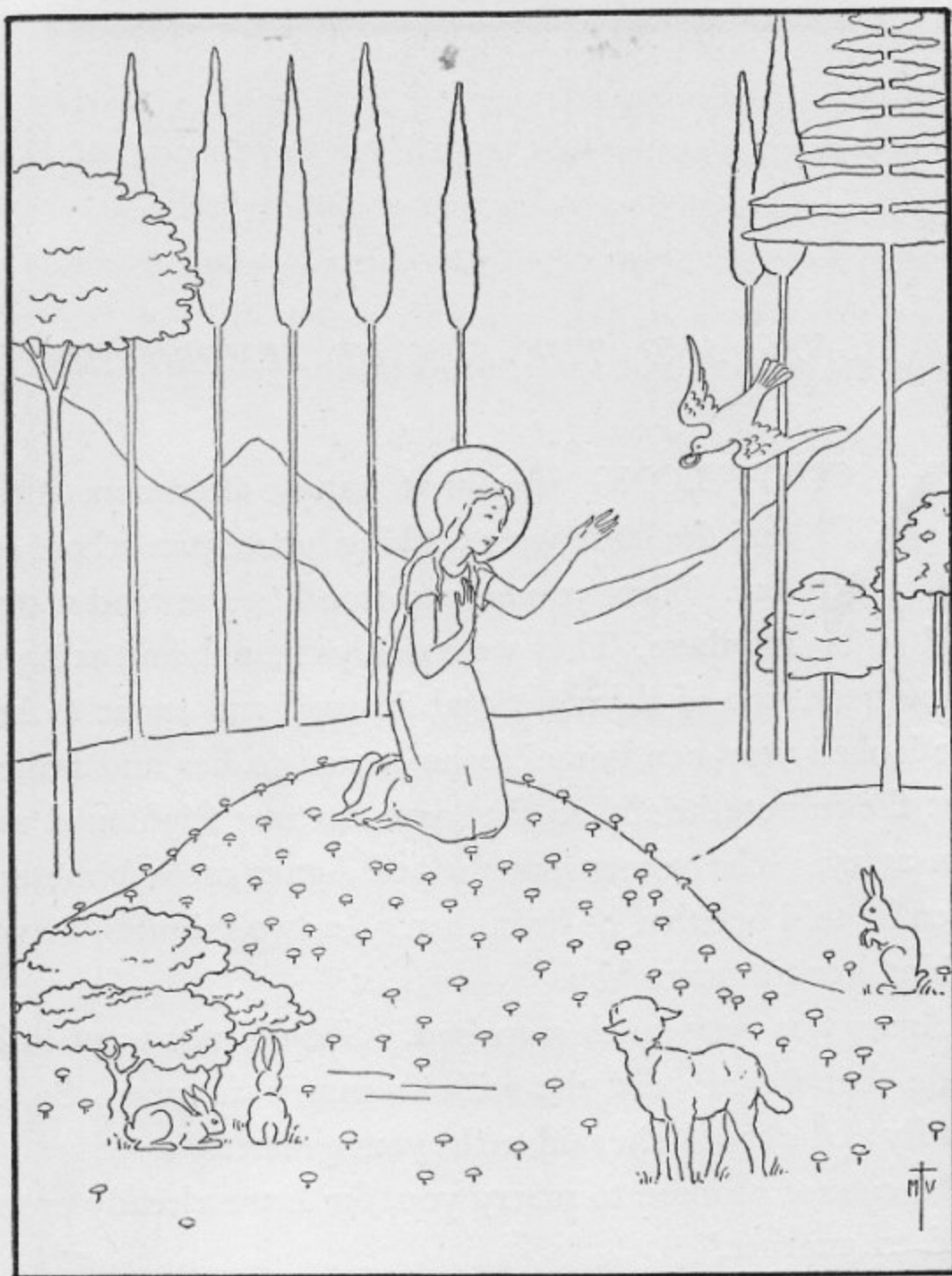


Agnes meditating on heavenly things

as though a shining white dove flew out of the sky and placed a beautiful ring upon her finger.

Agnes knew at once that it was Our Lord's ring, and was a sign He loved her so much that He wanted her to belong to Him forever. She promised Him that she would, and never before had she felt as happy as she did this day.

For she had become Our Lord's bride.



The Divine Espousals

V

AGNES AND THE SON OF SEMPRONIUS

NOT LONG after that happy afternoon, Agnes and the lamb were walking home from school one day. Three young men stood on the road watching them. They were richly dressed, and as Agnes drew near, one of them stepped forward and spoke to her. He looked very handsome, as he bowed to her and smiled, but the minute he did so the lamb became frightened and ran away. The young man helped Agnes catch him; and then he told her that he loved her. In two minutes, he was asking her to marry him.

Agnes was very much surprised. She did not want to be rude, but neither did she wish to marry anyone. So, as kindly as she could, she said to the young man:

"I cannot promise to marry you, for I am already promised to another."



Agnes refuses earthly love

She was thinking of Our Lord.

The young man was very sorry, for he loved Agnes greatly. He was angry, too, because his friends had laughed at him when they heard her refuse to marry him. Being rich and handsome, he thought that any girl should be delighted to marry him. Many young men are like that.

So he went home sulking, and told his father, whose name was Sempronius. Sempronius was called a prefect. He could put people in prison for wrong-doing, and have them punished cruelly.

At first Sempronius laughed at his son's story. But when he saw how the young man sulked, and that he would not eat or sleep or do anything but talk about Agnes, he became very serious. He decided to go to Agnes' house and ask her parents if they would not please let her marry his son. But first he went out and bought many beautiful presents for her.

When he laid them before Agnes and her family, he told them that if she would only marry his son, she should have everything that girls like best. He promised her a lovely house and beautiful clothes and rich jewels. But Agnes and her parents only repeated that she was already promised to another.

When Sempronius returned home and told this to his son, the young man became very stubborn and declared he would never give Agnes up. He went all over Rome, buying the costliest presents he could find, and a beautiful crown of jewels besides.

But when he brought these to Agnes, she would not take them.

"My Lover has already put his ring upon my finger," she said, "and has given me a necklace of precious stones, and has clothed me in a golden robe."

The young man rubbed his eyes, for he could not see any of these things. He was very stubborn, and she had to tell him all over again that she could not marry him. She was getting very tired of it all. The family, too, thought he would never leave; but at last he went home. There he sulked so much that he became very ill.

Sempronius sent for the wisest doctors in Rome to find out what was the matter. They came and looked at the young man, and thumped him all over. Then they coughed and said to Sempronius:

"He has the illness called love, and will never get well unless he can marry the maiden who has caused it."

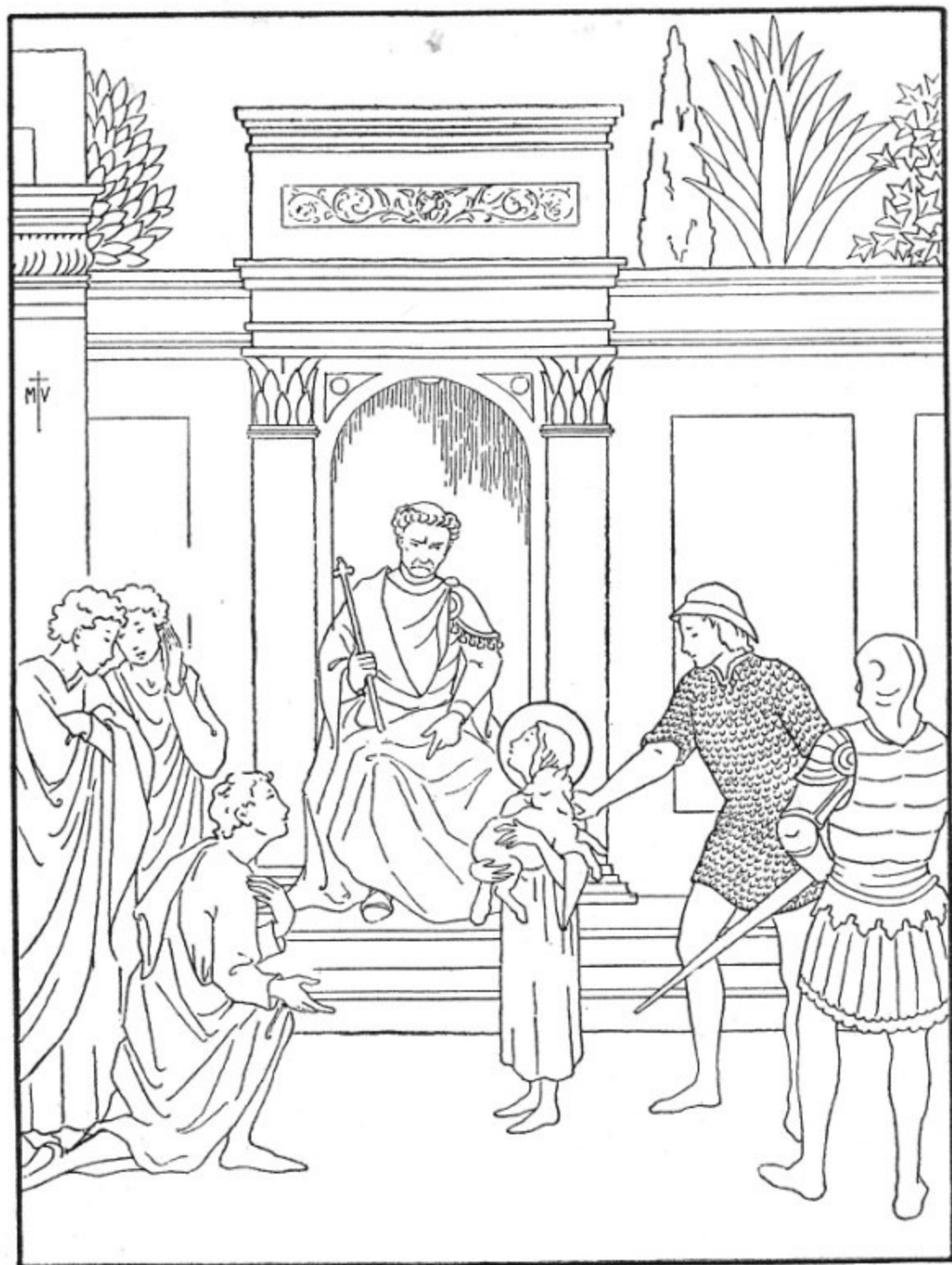
By this time Sempronius wished that his son had never

laid eyes on Agnes. But above all things, he wanted him to get well, so he went once more to see her father and mother. When they told him again that she was promised to someone else, he asked them who it was. Of course they could not say, for if they spoke of Our Lord, Sempronius would know that they and Agnes were Christians.

Then Sempronius grew extremely angry and declared he would find out who this secret lover was. So he asked everybody in Rome if they knew of any young man who was in love with Agnes, but they could only tell him about his own son. That angered him even more, and he set a spy to watch Agnes and her family, for he hoped in this way to learn who her lover was.

The spy peered through their window at night, and saw them all praying before a cross, and then he knew that they were Christians. He ran and told Sempronius. Now at last Sempronius knew to Whom Agnes was promised!

He put on his robes of justice and went to the hall where, as prefect, he judged people. Then he had his soldiers bring Agnes before him. When the lamb saw the young man again pleading with Agnes, he became very frightened, so she had to hold him in her arms. Then Sempronius began to question Agnes.



Agnes condemned by Sempronius

"Why will you not marry my son?" he demanded.

"Because I shall never marry anyone," she answered.

"If you will never marry anyone," said Sempronius, "you must let us take you to the Temple of Vesta."

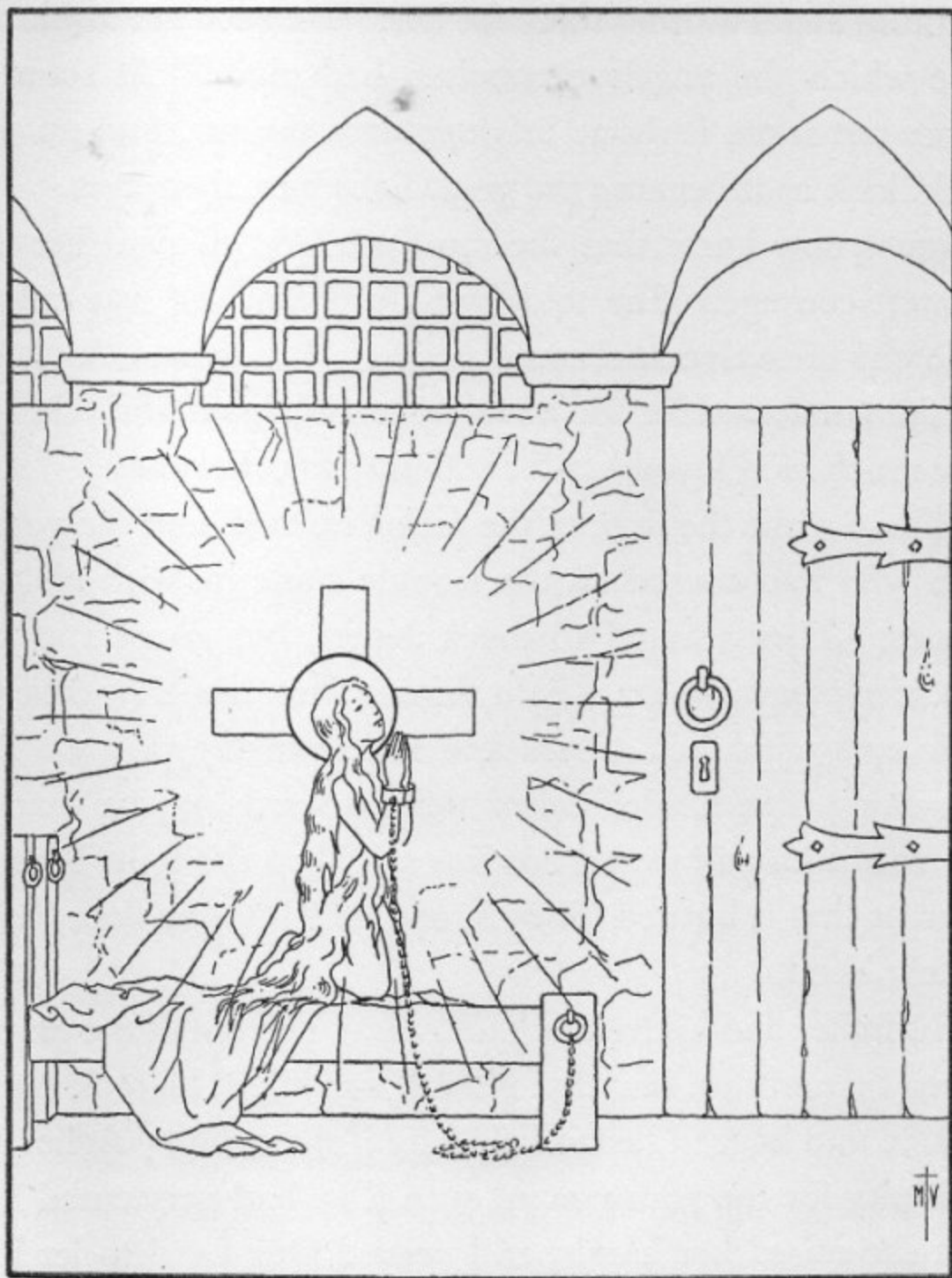
Now Vesta was one of the false goddesses worshipped by the pagans.

"All good girls who do not wish to marry, serve Vesta," declared Sempronius. "So you must come with us and burn incense at her altar."

"I can never do that," said Agnes, "for there is only one True God. I will burn incense only to Him!"

It was terrible to see how angry Sempronius became. He frightened Agnes by telling her of the awful ways in which he could punish her, and he had his soldiers drag her off to a dark prison. Before he sent her through the streets, he had her robe taken away from her, and poor Agnes was very much ashamed to be without any clothes. But God made her hair grow suddenly very long. It fell to the tips of her toes, and so she went off to prison wearing a golden cloak.

The soldiers would not let her take the lamb, but he trotted along behind her, and waited patiently outside the prison, hoping she would soon come out. Agnes at first was terribly frightened, but when she entered the prison she found her own



Agnes at prayer in the prison

beautiful angel waiting there for her. He gave her a shining robe which the angels themselves had made. As soon as Agnes put it on, it shone brighter than the sun, and no one could look at it because the great light hurt their eyes.

Agnes now knew that she must ask God to send her the greatest courage. She told Our Lord that she was only a little girl of twelve and could not help her tears. But soon she felt comforted for the angel appeared again and told her how much God loved her for suffering for His sake.

After a while the door of the prison opened, and the young man who had caused all the trouble came in, with his two friends. They wanted to mock Agnes, but as soon as the two friends saw the great light shining from her, they covered their eyes with their hands and ran from the prison. But the young man himself called them cowards, saying that he wasn't afraid, and would not leave. Then the light became so great that it burned his eyes, and he fell to the floor, completely blind.

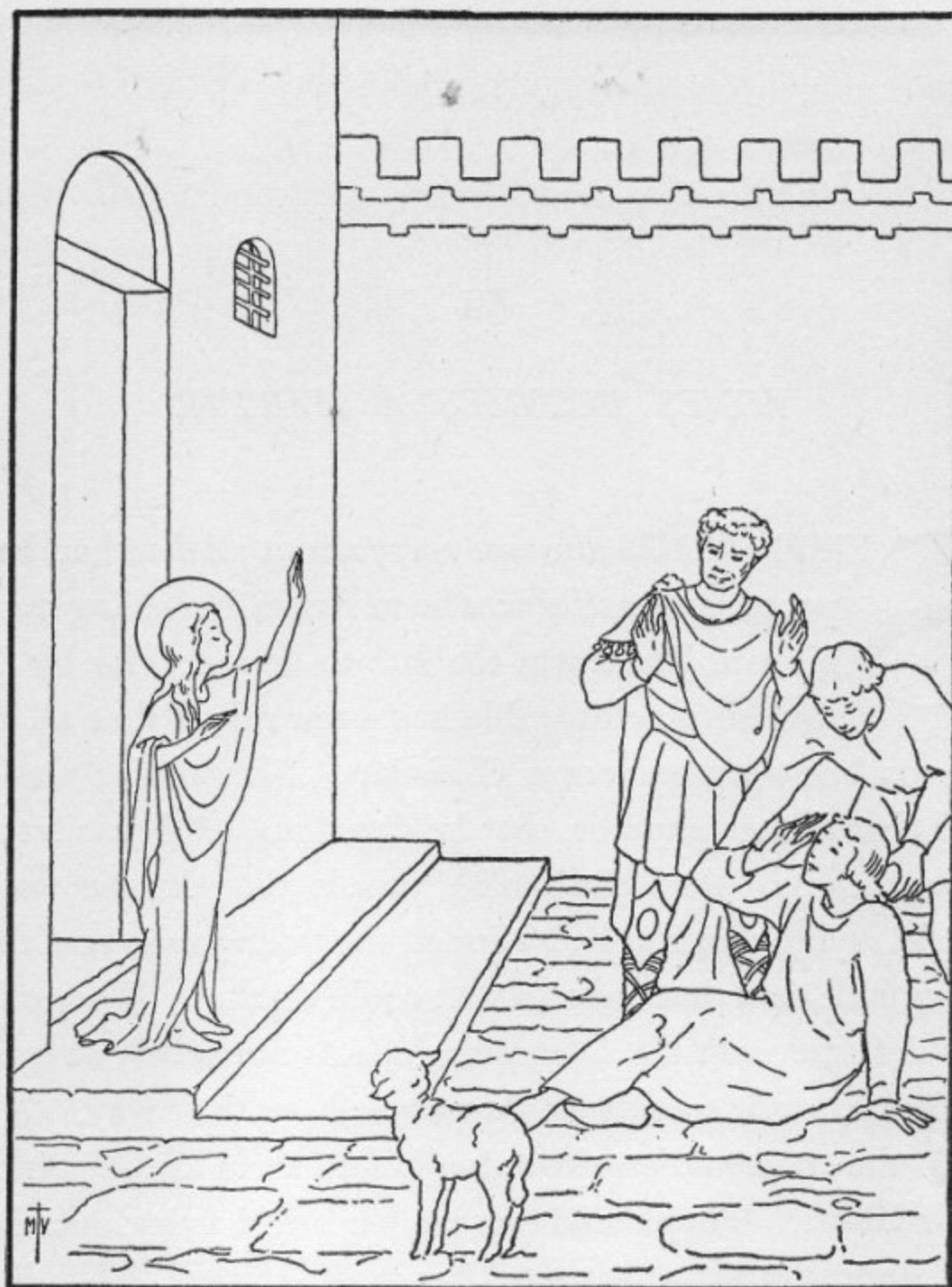
His father and his friends had to drag him out of the prison. When Sempronius saw that his son was blind, he took Agnes outside and begged her to help him if she could. Agnes felt such pity for the young man, even if he had persecuted her, that she raised her hands, and prayed Our Lord to let him



The lover of Agnes smitten with blindness

see again. Everyone was extremely surprised when, at Agnes' prayer, the young man opened his eyes and declared that he could see.

Then the young man thanked Agnes, and told her how sorry he was for having troubled her, and that he too now believed in Christ and would become a Christian. This made her very happy.



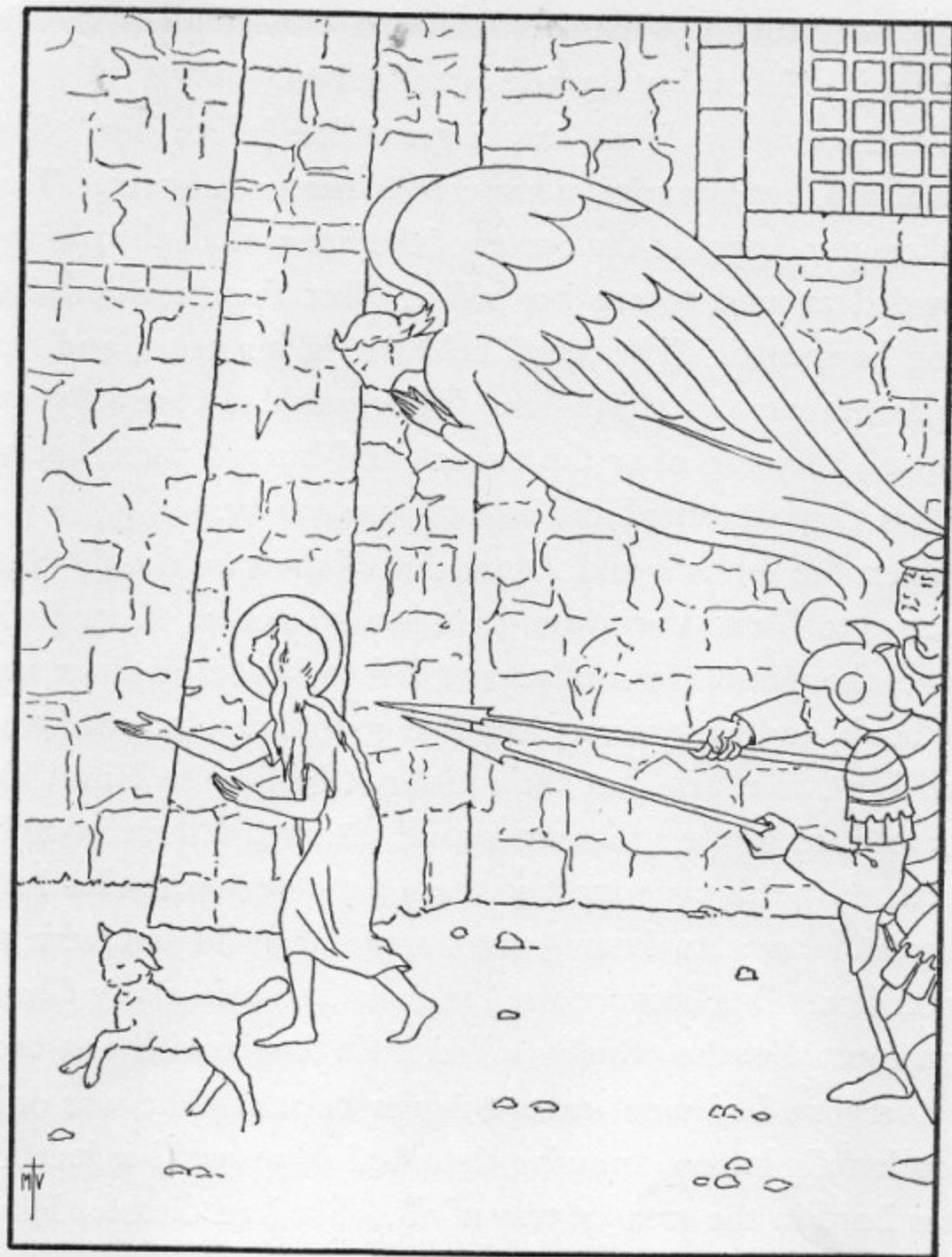
Agnes restores sight to her lover

VI

AGNES BECOMES A MARTYR

SEMPRONIUS also was sorry about all that had happened, so grateful was he to Agnes for having cured his son. But it was too late to be sorry, for by this time so much trouble had been raised that all the pagans knew Agnes was a Christian. Sempronius was in such fear of the Emperor, that he dared not let Agnes return to her home. And the foolish people thought she was a witch, saying that she had blinded the young man and then cured him, and that only a witch could do that. They cried out that she must die. Sempronius was not nearly as brave as Agnes, for he weakly let the people have their way.

So the cruel soldiers drove her before them at the point of their lances. They could not see her angel flying over her, but Agnes could, and it gave her great courage. The little



Agnes driven by soldiers to her martyrdom

lamb, not knowing what they intended, danced along by her side for joy that at last she was out of prison.

Then suddenly Agnes saw a great fire before her. She was afraid, but her angel whispered to her to be brave. The soldiers put Agnes in the center of the fire and all the pagans crowded around to see her suffer. But then a wonderful thing happened. The angel held her in his arms, and the hot flames ran away from her. They would not burn Agnes. Instead, they ran after the pagans and burned them badly, so that they screamed and had to jump away.

Then the soldiers told Agnes that if she would only offer incense to Vesta they would let her go home. Poor little Agnes thought of her mother and father, her foster sister and the lamb, and wanted very much to go to them, but she loved Our Lord so much that she could not be false to Him. So she told the soldiers that she would rather die than worship Vesta. By this time most of them were very sorry for her; they had come to know her courage and did not wish to harm her. But because the Emperor had said every Christian must die, they finally killed little Agnes with a sword.

Everyone had wept except Agnes herself. She was only wonderfully happy, knowing that she had proved her love for Our Lord in the greatest way of all. She had died for Him.

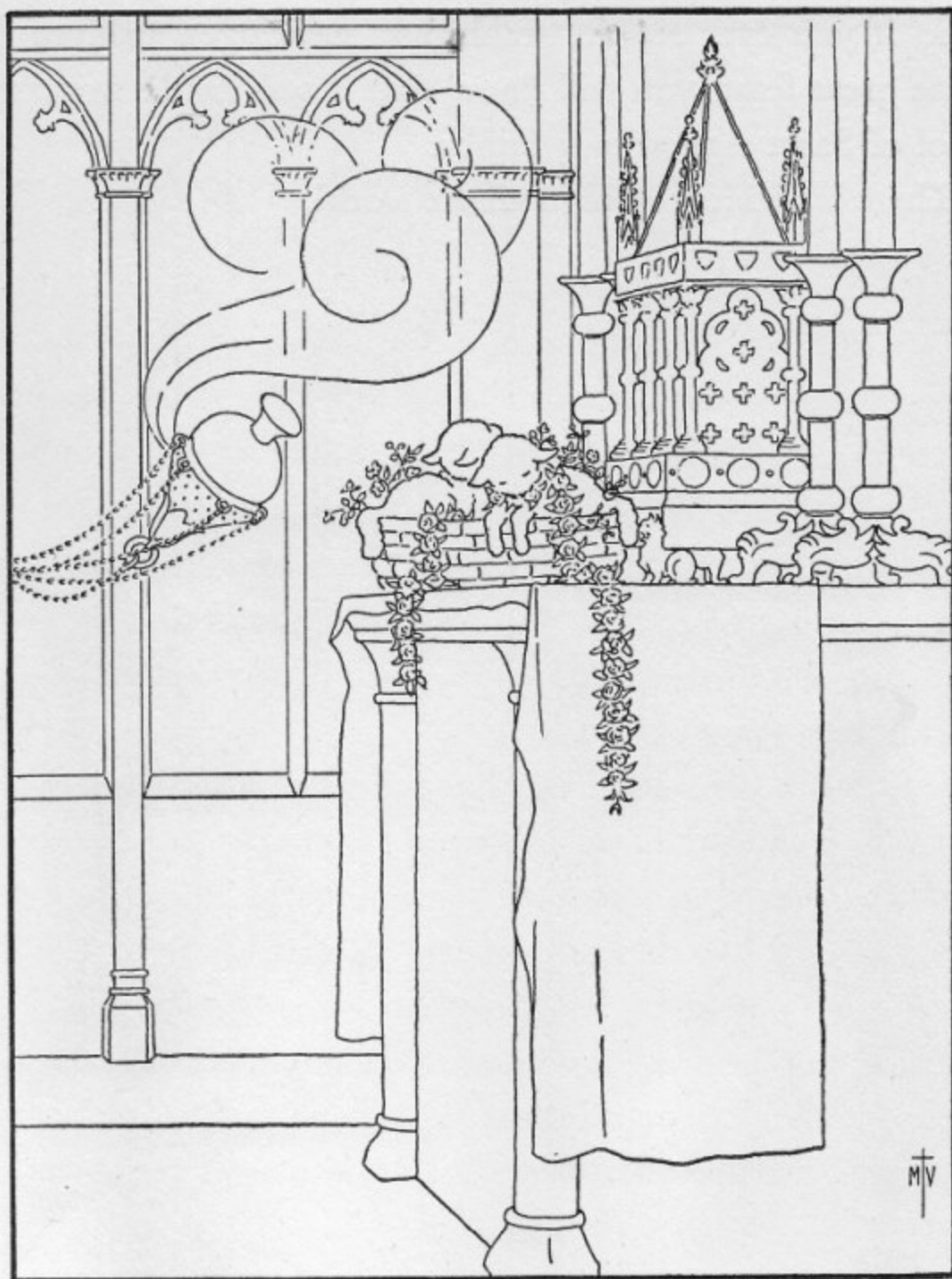


Agnes on the burning pyre

Her beautiful white soul flew with the angel straight to Heaven. There Our Lord met her with a glorious golden crown and all His Love. And there she has been with Him ever since, and will be forever. She looks down upon the world, and she loves the children who are brave and pure.

I am sure you are wondering what became of Agnes' lamb. Her foster sister, Emerentiana, took him home and cared for him with great kindness until it was time for him to die too. And then I think that Agnes took him up into Heaven for the infant angels to play with. Long afterward, when Rome had become a Christian city, a beautiful church was built near the place where Agnes died on January twenty-first those many years ago.

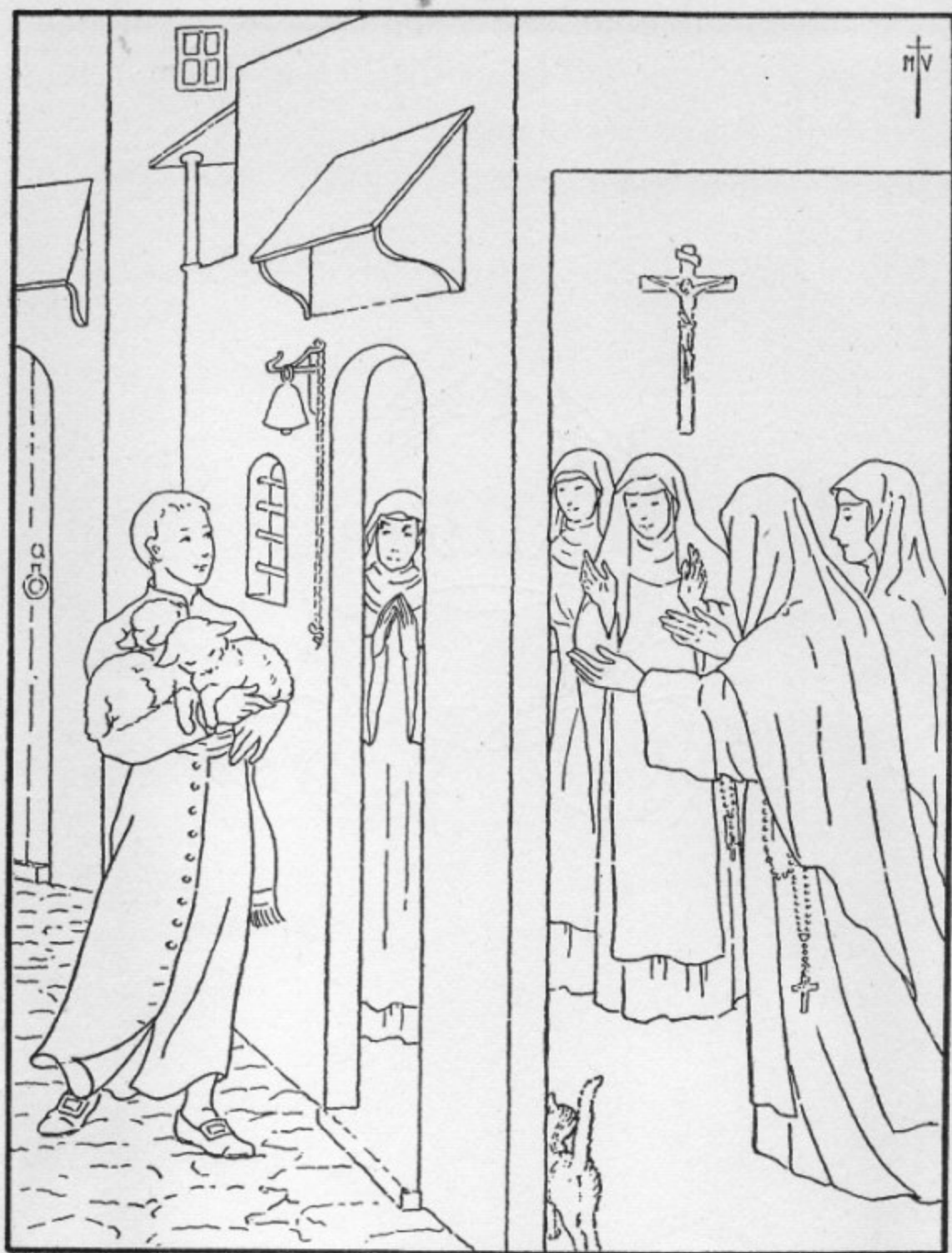
And every year since, on that day, two little lambs with garlands around their necks are taken there in a basket and solemnly blessed in honor of Saint Agnes. Then they are sent away to live in the convent garden of Saint Cecilia where the good nuns let them eat and play happily. By Easter time their wool has grown very long and soft, and the lambs gladly give it up in honor of Saint Agnes that it may be woven into a certain part of the costume of archbishops.



Blessing of the lambs

So if you ever see an archbishop wearing a pallium on some great feast, you will know that it was made from the wool of Saint Agnes' own lambs.

There is no nicer wool in all the world.



The lambs committed to the care of nuns





LITTLE SAINT AGNES

By Helen Walker Homan

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